

I doubt the President or the Secretary of Defense will answer these questions. Instead of answers, we get rhetoric that conflicts with just about everything we hear or read, including from some of this country's most distinguished retired military officers who served under both Republican and Democratic administrations.

Six months ago, the Vice President said the insurgency was in its last throes. That was just the latest in a long string of grossly inaccurate statements and predictions and false expectations about Iraq.

Secretary Rice, when asked recently when U.S. forces could begin to come home assuming the Administration's rosy predictions come true, could not, or would not, even venture a guess.

Without answers—real answers, honest answers—to these questions, I will not support the open-ended deployment of our troops in a war that was based on falsehood and justified with hubris.

Even though I opposed this war, I have prayed, like other Americans, that it would weaken the threat of terrorism and make the world safer, that our troops' sacrifices would be justified, and that the President had a plan for completing the mission.

Instead, it has turned Iraq into a training ground for terrorists, it is fueling the insurgency, it is causing severe damage to the reputation and readiness of the United States military, and it is preventing us from addressing the inexcusable weaknesses in our homeland security.

The Iraqi people, at least the Shiites and Kurds, have voted for a new constitution, as hastily drafted, flawed, and potentially divisive as it may be. Saddam Hussein, whose capacity for cruelty was seemingly limitless, is finally facing trial for his heinous crimes. Elections for a new national government are due by the end of the year. By then, it will be more than 2½ years since Saddam's overthrow, and we will have given the Iraqi people a chance to chart their own course. The sooner we reduce our presence there, the sooner they will have to make the difficult decisions necessary to solve their own problems in their own country.

Our military commanders say that Iraq's problems increasingly need to be solved through the political process, not through military force. We must show Iraq and the world that we are not an occupying force, and that we have no designs on their country or their oil. The American people need to know that the President has a plan to bring our troops home.

Once a new Iraqi government is in place, I believe the President should consult with Congress on a flexible plan that includes pulling our troops back from the densely populated areas where they are suffering the worst casualties and to bring them home.

It is also long overdue for Congress and the White House to reassess our policy toward this region.

The President has declared democracy is taking root throughout the Middle East, and there have been some small, positive steps. But they are dwarfed by the ongoing threat posed by Iran, Syria's continued meddling in Iraq and Lebanon, repression and corruption in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the danger that the momentum for peace from Israel's withdrawal from Gaza will be lost as settlement construction accelerates in the West Bank, and the widespread—albeit mistaken—belief among Muslims that the United States wants to destroy Islam itself.

Just as the White House's obsession with Iraq has diverted our resources and impeded our efforts to strengthen our defenses against terrorism at home, so has it made it more difficult to constructively, with our allies, address these regional threats.

As I have said, I did not support this war, and I believe that history will not judge kindly those who got us into this debacle by attacking a country that did not threaten us, after deceiving the American people and ridiculing those who appealed for caution and for instead mobilizing our resources directly against the threat of terrorism.

I worry that many of our young veterans who have gone to Iraq and experienced the brutality and trauma of war and may already feel guilty for having survived, will increasingly question its purpose. As the architects of this war move on to other jobs, I fear we are going to see another generation of veterans, many of them physically and psychologically scarred for life, who feel a deep sense of betrayal by their Government.

If President Bush will not say what remains to be done before he can declare victory and bring our troops home, then the Congress should be voting on what this war is really costing the Nation.

We should vote on paying for the war versus cutting Medicaid, as some are proposing; or pay for the war versus cutting VA programs that are already unable to pay the staggering costs of treatment and rehabilitation for our injured veterans; or pay for it versus rebuilding our National Guard; or rebuilding FEMA; or securing our ports and our borders; or investing in our intelligence so we can finally capture Osama bin Laden; or investing in health care for the tens of millions of Americans who cannot afford to get sick; or fixing our troubled schools, so our children can learn to do a better job than we have of making the world a safer place for all people.

These, and the tarnished reputation of a country that I love and so many once admired as not only powerful but also good and just are the real costs of this war.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania is recognized.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I put all Senators on notice that we will

soon be starting the debate on an amendment to be offered by Senator DURBIN. We had expected to go on the bill at 10, with morning business scheduled from 9:30 to 10, but morning business has run a little late. One of the Senators asked for an extension of time, which was not objected to. Now Senator STABENOW has asked for 5 minutes, which we will agree to. Senator HARKIN and I are on the floor, and we are anxious to proceed with the business of the bill. I know Senator HARKIN would like to make a comment.

Mr. HARKIN. If the distinguished chairman would yield, I am sorry I was off the floor momentarily, but did the Senator from Pennsylvania do anything about the amendment that is pending?

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, the request was made to have the amendment which is pending accepted by a voice vote. It is really in the nature of a technical amendment. The amendment reduces Federal administrative costs for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services by \$15 million with no cuts coming from oversight and enforcement. This reduction is necessary to bring the Labor-HHS bill into compliance with its allocation ceiling. Concerns have been raised that this reduction would reduce the funds available to administer the new prescription drug program. This is not the case—the reduction will come from administrative overhead, supplies and contracts. We had talked about having a vote on it this morning at 10:30, but in light of the request that we not vote on that amendment but vote on the Durbin amendment, that is acceptable to this side.

As I said before, Senator STABENOW has asked for 5 minutes, and we are prepared to yield that time. But we want to put all Senators on notice we are anxious to proceed with the bill, and I will expect to start on the Durbin amendment at about 10:24 and expect to vote on it sometime between 10:45 and 11.

Senator HARKIN and I, backed by the leaders, have said that we are going to do our best to enforce 20-minute votes, 15 and a 5-minute extension. So all Senators should know when we start the Durbin vote that it will be limited to 20 minutes to the extent that Senator HARKIN and I can prevail on that. When we finish the Durbin vote at about 11:15, we would be pressing to have amendments filed. We have a long, complicated bill. There is an amendment lined up at 2:15, but if we are to move this bill along and to avoid pressing for third reading and final passage, we want to avoid lengthy quorum calls.

I yield the floor.

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Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first, I appreciate the courtesies extended to me by the distinguished Senator from Pennsylvania and the distinguished Senator from Iowa.